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## THE CHURCH IN NORTH AMERICA (GREENLAND) IN THE MIDDLE AGES

### I

Some time in the second half of the tenth century, perhaps in the decade following 970, there came to Iceland a Norwegian immigrant, Eric Thorwaldsson by name, though usually known as Eric the Red. The early settlers of Iceland, the men who had "taken land" two or three generations before, had appropriated the better part of the country, and Eric was forced to set up his homestead in the bleak and barren wastes on the northwestern shores of the island. Later he moved farther south into the more interesting and hospitable region of Broadfirth. Eric the Red was of a restless disposition; he was proud and wilful and had an unruly temper. He had been forced to leave Norway because of man-slaying and in Iceland, too, he found it difficult to avoid the bloodfeud. During his brief stay on the island he was twice found guilty of bloodshed, with the result that he and his entire household were finally outlawed.

There was a story current in Iceland of one Gunnbjörn whose ship had been driven westward many years before till it touched a new land which the Icelanders called Gunnbjörn's-reef. Eric the Red had for some time been preparing for a voyage, and soon after the moot had acted on the charges against him, he quietly sailed his ship out of Broadfirth and entered the unknown seas.

Three years later Eric returned to Broadfirth. He had found the "reef" and had named it Greenland, "for he said that men would be the more ready to go thither if it had a good name." He made peace with his chief enemy in Iceland and began to seek recruits for a colonizing venture in the new land. In this he was immediately successful; the summer after his return twenty-five ships sailed to Greenland, of which only fourteen were able to complete the perilous journey; the rest were wrecked or driven back to Iceland. Are the Priest, who inserted an account of the settlement of Greenland in his "Book of Settlements," states that the colony was founded "sixteen winters before Christendom was made law in Iceland."<sup>1</sup> This calculation would

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<sup>1</sup> *Landnáma-bók*, ii, c. 12 (VIGFUSSON and POWELL, *Origines Islandicae*, i, 72-76). Cf. (ARE, *Libellus Islandorum*, c. 6 (*ibid.*, 294).

place the event in the summer of 984. Other sources place it a year or two later. The annalists seem to favor 986.<sup>2</sup>

About forty or fifty miles northwest of Cape Farewell the coast line is broken by a series of fjords that run far back into the land. Here (in the present Julianehaab district) Eric had decided to plant his colony. His own homestead he located at Brentlithe on the Ericsfirth, which became in a sense the center and the capital of the settlement. Most of his followers built their homes in this lower fjord district, but a smaller number sailed some two hundred miles farther to the northwest where another series of fjords offered favorable conditions for settlement. Thus there grew up two colonies, the smaller West Settlement in the present Godthaab area and the larger East Settlement farther down the coast.

The men and women who settled Greenland doubtless all, or nearly all, worshipped according to heathen rites. They cannot, however, have been wholly unacquainted with the Christian faith, for in 981 or thereabouts one Frederick, a German missionary (he is called bishop in the Icelandic sources), had begun to preach the Christian gospel to the Icelanders, though with no appreciable success.<sup>3</sup> Both Iceland and Greenland accepted Christianity about the year 1000, the conversion being due largely to the missionary zeal of the king of Norway.

In the summer of 999, Leif, the son of Eric the Red, made a journey to Norway and spent the following winter at the court of Olaf Trygvesson. The king took a liking to the young Greenland and asked him to undertake the conversion of the Greenland colony. Leif accepted the mission with some reluctance, for he "thought that this errand would be hard to carry through in Greenland." The king found "a priest and other learned men" who were willing to undertake the long journey, and Leif set sail for the west.<sup>4</sup>

In Old Norse life matters of religion were an important activity of the organized state, and the question whether to adopt a new faith must in some way or other have come before the

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<sup>2</sup> STORM, *Islandske Annaler*; see entries for the year 986.

<sup>3</sup> *Cristne Saga*, cc. 1, 2 (*Origines Islandicae*, i, 376-383); STORM, *Islandske Annaler*, anno, 981.

<sup>4</sup> *Olaf Trygvesson's Saga*, c. 103 (*Codex Frisianus*, 157).

*Althing*, or folk-moot, which was the governing authority in the republic, though of such popular action there is no record. But the Saga tells us that Leif's mission was quite successful.

Eric did not take it at all eagerly, that he should put away his own way of faith, but Theodhild [his wife] accepted it at once, and had a church built not very near the house. This church was called Theodhild's church. She used to hold her prayers there with such folk as took upon them Christendom, and they were many. Theodhild would not live with Eric after she had taken the faith and this grieved him very much.<sup>5</sup>

## II

The physical conditions in the colony were such that only with the greatest difficulty could the Church maintain a normal existence. The settlements were founded on a narrow strip of land along the upper stretches of the fjords, where there was shelter from the keen winds that blew in from the southwest. Here the soil thaws out in the summer and grass grows quite abundantly. But a few miles back are hills and mountains covered with everlasting ice. Under such conditions agriculture was impossible, and practically every form of vegetable food had to be brought from afar; all the metals that are needed in civilized life also had to be imported from Europe.

The merchants who visited Greenland usually came from Norway; but an occasional ship also came from Iceland, and the merchants of England are likewise known to have traded in Greenland.<sup>6</sup> But such communication as there was with the outer world was often quite irregular; years might pass without the visit of a single ship. In 1308 Bishop Arne of Bergen sent a letter to the bishop of Greenland in which he reported as recent news the death of King Eric, who had passed away nine years earlier.<sup>7</sup>

The population of Greenland in the Middle Ages can scarcely have counted more than 3,000 inhabitants at any time. In an old description of the country the West Settlement is credited with 90 homesteads and the East Settlement with 190.<sup>8</sup> The churches were relatively numerous: twelve in the larger settle-

<sup>5</sup> *The Saga of Thorfinn Carlsemne*, c. 2 (*Origines Islandicae*), ii, 615.

<sup>6</sup> *Grönlands historiske Mindesmærker*, iii, 160 ff.

<sup>7</sup> *Diplomatarium Norvegicum*, x, 14-15.

<sup>8</sup> *Grönlands historiske Mindesmærker*, iii, 226-229 (*Grönlandiae vetus Chorographia*).

ment and four in the smaller.<sup>9</sup> The parishes were necessarily small, as the absence of roads and the severity of the weather in winter would not permit long journeys to church.

Ivar Bardsson, who went to Greenland in 1341 or the following year and for a number of years was steward at the Cathedral church,<sup>10</sup> reports that in his day there were two monastic establishments in the colony: "a great monastery dwelt in by regular canons," and "a cloister of nuns of Saint Benedict's Order."<sup>11</sup> These were located in the southern part of the East Settlement, some distance from the center of colonial life.

The monastery was consecrated to Saint Olaf and Saint Augustine. That Saint Olaf, the foremost of the Norwegian saints, should hold the first place in the hearts of the Greenlanders was only natural. It was also to be expected that Saint Nicholas, the patron saint of the seafaring man, should be generally popular on the perilous shores of the Arctic; the cathedral at Gardar was dedicated to Saint Nicholas.<sup>12</sup> Another very popular saint was Saint Thorlak, an Icelandic bishop (1178–1193) whose worship dates from an act by the popular assembly of Iceland in 1199.<sup>13</sup>

Our knowledge of the economic life of Old Greenland is derived largely from a systematic study of material remains. A considerable number of ruins have been explored including the sites of several churches. It appears that the church buildings were nearly all comparatively small, from 23 to 30 feet wide and from 50 to 60 feet long, measured on the outside. As the walls were usually at least 4 feet thick, the room inside was often quite limited. The plan was always rectangular and there was usually no projecting choir. The walls were built of red sandstone, turf, and clay; in one case only (Kakortok) do the ruins show any trace of mortar. The roof was made of wood. The windows were

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<sup>9</sup> The lists vary somewhat. See *Flateyrbok*, iii, 454; *Grönlands historiske Mindesmærker*, iii, 224 (Gripla); *Meddelelser om Grönland*, xx, 319–320 (Finnur Jónsson).

<sup>10</sup> *Diplomatarium Norvegicum*, v, 122; DeCOSTA, *Sailing Directions of Henry Hudson*, 95.

<sup>11</sup> DeCOSTA, *Sailing Directions of Henry Hudson*, 92.

<sup>12</sup> *Grönlands historiske Mindesmærker*, iii, 224 (Gripla).

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, ii, 773.

placed in the roof, but the church at Kakortok is the only one that is known to have had glazed windows.<sup>14</sup>

It has long been known that the colony was organized as a diocese with the cathedral at Gardar, a place that has only recently been identified. Gardar was located on the south side of a low, narrow isthmus in the Igaliko region, near an inlet anciently known as Einarsfirth. The soil here is relatively fertile, and the large number of ruins would indicate that this region was the real center of the East Settlement. The walls of the church at Gardar have been traced and show that it was built on the plan of a cross; it seems to have been the only cruciform church in Greenland. Its total length, measured on the inside, was about 74 feet. The nave was 26 feet wide and the choir somewhat narrower. The transepts, extending only 4 feet beyond the walls of the nave, were quite small. There was no projecting apse.<sup>15</sup>

Wood for the necessary church furniture ordinarily had to be imported from Norway. There are occasional groves of birch in Greenland, but few of the trees measure more than a few inches in diameter. A great deal of driftwood finds its way from northern Siberia across the Arctic and southward through Smith Sound; but this would not always prove serviceable for church purposes.<sup>16</sup> It is told that the men who sailed to Vinland loaded their frail ships with grapes and wood for the return voyage.<sup>17</sup> Another possible source of supplies was Markland (evidently the southeastern part of Labrador),<sup>18</sup> where the timber is very plentiful.<sup>19</sup> The churchyards also testify to the poverty of suitable lumber: in a few cases only have traces of coffins been found; ordinarily the Greenlanders buried their dead under large, flat stones.<sup>20</sup>

Greater still was the dearth of iron. Except in a few cases,

<sup>14</sup> *Meddelelser om Grönland*, vi, 75 ff. (Holm); xvi, 293 ff. (Brun).

<sup>15</sup> *Meddelelser om Grönland*, xvi, 324-330 (Brun).

<sup>16</sup> *Meddelelser om Grönland*, xvi, 198 (Brun); xlviii, 6 (Björnbo).

<sup>17</sup> *The Saga of Eric the Red*, cc. 2-3 (*Origines Islandicæ*, ii, 601-603).

<sup>18</sup> FOSSUM, *The Norse Discovery of America*, 40-41, 64.

<sup>19</sup> STORM, *Islandske Annaler*, anno 1347 (Skalholt Annals). "In that year came a ship from Greenland to Iceland; it was of smaller size than the Icelandic ships. . . . It had fared to Markland, but had been driven hither by storms."

<sup>20</sup> *Meddelelser om Grönland*, vi, 75 ff., 119.

such coffins as have been found seem to show that they were made with wooden nails. In 1189, a ship came from Greenland to Iceland "which was nailed together with wooden nails."<sup>21</sup> Church bells were probably not common; fragments of a bell have been found in the ruins of the cathedral at Gardar,<sup>22</sup> but it is not known whether any other church was provided with a bell.

Cloth of a character suitable for use in the ceremonials of the Church was difficult to obtain. The Greenlanders kept sheep (and also goats) in considerable numbers,<sup>23</sup> but it is unlikely that the cloth woven in those regions could serve the purposes of the Church. Remnants of brown woolen cloth have been found in certain cemeteries, but ordinarily the Greenlanders appear to have buried their dead without shrouds or any other covering.<sup>24</sup>

The supply of cloth, like almost everything else that had to be imported by the colonists, came chiefly from Norway. In 1308, Bishop Arne of Bergen sent four costly outer garments to Bishop Thored in Greenland: "a 'skingr,' a surcoat, and a cowl dyed blue, all lined with gray fur; also a mantle of the same sort of cloth."<sup>25</sup> In 1347 King Magnus and Queen Blanche drew up a will in which they remembered the cathedral in Greenland with one hundred marks (a handsome sum in those days) to be used for the purchase of "costly vestments."<sup>26</sup>

The greatest problem of the church authorities in Greenland seems to have been how to secure the materials necessary for sacramental purposes: oil for the chrism and bread and wine for the Eucharist. Grain does not grow in Greenland. "And yet there are men among those who are counted the wealthiest and most prominent who have tried to sow grain as an experiment; but the great majority in that country do not know what bread is, having never seen it."<sup>27</sup> The foregoing statement from *The*

<sup>21</sup> STORM, *Islandske Annaler*, anno 1189 (*Annales regii*).

<sup>22</sup> *Meddelelser om Grönland*, xx, 289-290.

<sup>23</sup> LARSON, *The King's Mirror*, 145.

<sup>24</sup> *Meddelelser om Grönland*, vi, 75 ff.

<sup>25</sup> *Diplomatarium Norvegicum*, x, 14-15.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, v. 151. Evil days came to the kingdom in the reign of King Magnus, and doubt has been expressed as to whether the cathedral ever did derive profit from the royal will. *Grönlands Historiske Mindesmærker*, iii, 116.

<sup>27</sup> LARSON, *The King's Mirror*, 142.

*King's Mirror* suggests the mode of life in the thirteenth century; striking confirmation of this appears in a papal bull from near the close of the fifteenth century in which it is told that the inhabitants of Greenland "are accustomed to live upon dried fish and milk for the reason that bread, wine and oil are scarce."<sup>28</sup>

Grain for bread could be obtained in Norway, where all the hardier species are quite generally cultivated; in certain favored localities even wheat is grown with some success. But often years would pass without a cargo of any sort from abroad reaching Greenland, and one can readily see that the priests cannot have been able to celebrate the Mass so regularly or so frequently as the Church requires. In 1237, when Bishop Nicholas was preparing to depart for his new field of work on the edge of the Arctic, Pope Gregory IX prepared a reply to a very significant question that had come to him from the archbishop of Nidaros (Trondhjem). The archbishop had stated that in some of the dioceses of his province there was great dearth of wheat and had asked whether a wafer made of other materials might be given to the worshippers instead, to which the Pope replied in the negative.<sup>29</sup>

The archbishop had also stated that there was lack of wine in those churches, "for rarely or never is any wine to be obtained in those parts," and had inquired whether beer or some other drink might be substituted; but to this the Pope would not assent. He did suggest, however, that the consecrated bread alone might be given to the congregation, "as the custom is in certain parts."<sup>30</sup>

It seems evident that the church in Greenland also suffered from a lack of priests and other church officials, at least in the first century of its history. The clergy was recruited from Iceland and Norway; that the colony had any facilities for the education of a local priesthood is quite unlikely. Adam, the chronicler of Bremen, tells us that in 1054 envoys came to Bremen from Iceland, Greenland, and the Orkneys requesting that priests be

<sup>28</sup> *Diplomatarium Norvegicum*, xvii, 644; *Catholic Historical Review*, iii, 226; OLSON and BOURNE, *The Northmen, Columbus and Cabot*, 73.

<sup>29</sup> *Diplomatarium Norvegicum*, i, 14.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.* ". . . quamquam dari possit populo panis simpliciter benedictus, prout in quibusdam partibus fieri consuevit." See also *Grönlands historiske Mindesmærker*, ii, 766-767.



sent to those lands.<sup>31</sup> This lack of ordained pastors is also reflected in the burial customs of earlier times as described in one of the Vinland sagas.

This custom had been in Greenland since Christianity came out thither that men were buried there at the homesteads when they died in unconsecrated earth. They used to set a pole up from their breast, and afterward, when clerks came there, then they would pull up the pole and pour in holy water, and hold the chant over it, though it were a long time afterward.<sup>32</sup>

Though the poverty and hardships of life in Old Greenland must have been very great and very real, the colony also had certain sources of abundant wealth.

It is reported that the pasturage is good and that there are large and fine farms in Greenland. The farmers raise cattle and sheep in large numbers and make butter and cheese in great quantities. The people subsist chiefly on these foods and on beef; but they also eat the flesh of various kinds of game, such as reindeer, whales, seals and bears.<sup>33</sup>

The churches derived their income from these sources, especially from the riches of the sea. Ivar Bardsson tells of a bay where "there were many whales and much hunting for them," of an island where white bears were plentiful, and of another island where many reindeer resorted in the autumn; but there could be neither hunting nor fishing in these places without the bishop's consent, for the fishing and the hunting rights belonged to the cathedral church. The cathedral also derived revenue from certain hot springs which were believed to have medicinal virtues and from a "forest" in which cattle were pastured.<sup>34</sup> The endowments of the other churches appear to have been of a similar character.

In 1274, the Council of Lyons decreed that for a period of six years the clergy should contribute a tithe to be used for the promotion of the cause of Christendom in the Holy Land. The precious metals were scarce in Norway and even more so in the Norwegian colonies, and the archbishop, to whom the collection of the tithe had been entrusted, was reluctant to undertake the

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<sup>31</sup> ADAM OF BREMEN, *Gesta Hammenburgensis Ecclesiae Pontificum*, iii, c. 23.

<sup>32</sup> *Saga of Thorfinn Carlsemne*, c. 3 (*Origines Islandicæ*, ii, 617).

<sup>33</sup> LARSON, *The King's Mirror*, 145.

<sup>34</sup> DECOSTA, *Sailing Directions of Henry Hudson*, 90-93.

task.<sup>35</sup> He reported "that the only tithes that can be gathered in Greenland are composed of skins of cattle and seals, tusks, and ropes of whales [walrus hide] which . . . cannot be sold for any fair price."<sup>36</sup> The Pope replied that the tithes should be collected and the materials exchanged in the best way possible for gold or silver, which was presumably done.

In 1327 the clergy of Greenland contributed to a second sexennial tithe, the payment this time taking the form of walrus tusks. The collector, Bertrand de Ortolis, received in all 127 *lisponsos*<sup>37</sup> of this commodity, which he sold to a Flemish merchant for 12 pounds and 14 sous Tournois, a considerable sum for a diocese with a population so small as that of Gardar. The collector also accounts for three *lisponsos* of walrus tusks received at the same time in payment of the Peter's pence.<sup>38</sup>

There seems to be no record of any subsequent payment to the papal treasury. In 1345 Archbishop Paul and his suffragans, in apportioning a tithe due at that time among the various dioceses of the province, definitely excused the Faroes and Gardar from sharing in the payment.<sup>39</sup> In 1402 Boniface IX directed Bishop Jacob of Bergen to collect revenues for the Holy See in several dioceses including Gardar;<sup>40</sup> but as all communication with Greenland ceased a few years later, it is not likely that the clergy of Gardar made any contributions in the fifteenth century.

### III

For more than a century the new Church in Greenland was without episcopal supervision. It may be that during this period the colony enjoyed an occasional visit from an alien bishop, as

<sup>35</sup> *Catholic Historical Review*, iii, 217 ff.; Munch, *Pavelige Nuntiers Regnskabs og Dagböger*, 139 ff.

<sup>36</sup> *Catholic Historical Review*, iii, 222 (translation slightly corrected). The ropes of walrus hide are mentioned in *The King's Mirror*, 140, 142.

<sup>37</sup> The Norwegian *lispund* is usually translated "stone"; it should probably be reckoned at 12 pounds.

<sup>38</sup> MUNCH, *Pavelige Nuntiers Regnskabs og Dagböger*, 25, 28. Dr. Jelić has attempted to show on the basis of the Peter's pence of 1327 that Greenland had a population of at least 10,000. (*L'évangélisation de l'Amérique avant Christophe Colomb*). The errors in Jelić's calculation are discussed by Storm in *Historisk Tidsskrift*, 3. Række, ii, 396-397.

<sup>39</sup> *Diplomatarium Norvegicum*, iv, 239.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, vi, 396 ff.

was the case in Iceland, where at least six bishops officiated at intervals before the island received its own episcopal organization. It is also possible that after 1056, when Islaf was consecrated bishop of Skalholt (Iceland), Greenland was regarded as officially or unofficially joined to the new diocese; but this is conjecture merely.

During the eleventh century the Scandinavian lands continued a part of the great province of Bremen. But the relations between the Saxon archbishops and the Northern kings were not always cordial, and the Pope was finally induced to permit the establishment of a new province with the Danish (now Swedish) city of Lund as the metropolitan see (1104).

The new archbishop proceeded at once with the organization of new dioceses in the Norwegian colonies. A new bishopric was established in northern Iceland (Holar) in 1106. The Faroes were organized as a diocese about the same date. It seems likely that the churches in Greenland received their first resident bishop early in the following decade, perhaps in 1112.

We read in one of the Icelandic annals that in 1112 "Eric the bishop" went on a journey, presumably to Greenland.<sup>41</sup> It is stated again that in 1121 "Eric, bishop of Greenland, went to seek Vinland."<sup>42</sup> Eric is also mentioned in the "Book of Settlements" as bishop of the Greenlanders.<sup>43</sup> There has been some dispute as to whether he was actual bishop in Greenland: Finnur Jónsson holds that he was probably a missionary bishop<sup>44</sup> like Frederic the Saxon who had labored in Iceland in the tenth century. But it must be remembered that Greenland was no longer a field for missionary effort, having accepted the Christian faith three generations before.

Bishop Eric evidently did not return from his voyage, for two years later the Greenlanders took steps to secure a new bishop. On the motion of Socke Thoresson, the leading man in the colony, the all-moot sent Einar Sockesson to Norway to request a bishop at King Sigurd's court. "Einar had with him much tusk-ivory and walrus-hide to help himself forward with

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<sup>41</sup> STORM, *Islandske Annaler*, 251.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, anno 1121.

<sup>43</sup> C. 6 (*Origines Islandicæ*, i, 30).

<sup>44</sup> *Historisk Tidsskrift*, 5. Række, i, 119.

the chief people." For King Sigurd he brought a bear, evidently a white bear, and the king was pleased with the present.

King Sigurd found Einar's request quite reasonable and asked Arnold, one of the clerks at the royal court, "to take up this task for God's sake and his prayers." Arnold accepted the appointment with great reluctance: Greenland was far distant and the people there were hard to manage. He proceeded to Lund, however, where he was consecrated by Archbishop Asser (1124), and two years later he took up the work in the new field where he labored for twenty-four years.<sup>45</sup>

Bishop Arnold seems to have been a typical medieval prelate, humble and devout in his private life, but zealous and unbending in all matters touching what he regarded as the rights of his office and his diocese. He established his see at Gardar,<sup>46</sup> one of the best farms in the colony, which was also the meeting place of the all-moot. Bishop Arnold resigned his see in 1150, and apparently returned to Norway. Two years later he was appointed bishop of the new Norwegian see of Hamar.<sup>47</sup>

Arnold's successor was John Knut, concerning whom almost nothing of importance is known. He was consecrated in 1150 and governed his diocese till his death in 1187.<sup>48</sup> In 1152 Nicholas Brakspeare, Cardinal Bishop of Albano, came to Norway on a legatine mission with instructions to create a new Norwegian province with Nidaros as the metropolitan see. The diocese of Gardar became one of the suffragan sees of the new archbishopric. Consequently Bishop John's successor, another John (also called "Smirill"), was consecrated (and also appointed, it seems) by Archbishop Eystein (1188). He had probably at one time served as clerk at the royal court, though his by-name "Sverresfostre" might indicate that he had been brought up in King Sverre's family.

Bishop John II sailed for Greenland in 1189 but was forced

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<sup>45</sup> The story of Arnold's appointment and consecration is told in *The Tale of the Greenlanders* (*Origines Islandicae*, ii, 748 ff).

<sup>46</sup> Ivar Bardsson speaks of a church at Stensness in the West Settlement, "where in former times was the bishop's seat," but there is no mention of this in any other source. DE COSTA, *Sailing Directions of Henry Hudson*, 95.

<sup>47</sup> STORM, *Islandske Annaler*, anno 1152.

<sup>48</sup> STORM, *Islandske Annaler*, anno 1187.

to winter in Iceland, and did not reach Gardar before 1190.<sup>49</sup> In 1202 he set out on a long journey to Norway and Rome. He spent the winter in Iceland, and on Shear-Thursday, April 3, 1203, we are told that he assisted Bishop Paul at the consecration of "a great quantity of chrism."<sup>50</sup> He died in 1209.

The news of Bishop John's death can scarcely have reached Norway before 1210. His successor, Bishop Helgi, apparently sailed from Norway in 1211, for an entry in the Icelandic Annals appears to indicate that he spent the following winter at Flat-isle.<sup>51</sup> The new prelate was the son of a Norwegian merchant who, it is believed, had important connections in Greenland.<sup>52</sup> He arrived at Gardar in 1212 and administered the see for eighteen years.

The next in the order of succession was Nicholas, who was consecrated in 1234. The delay in filling the vacancy was probably due to the fact that the metropolitan office had become vacant in the year of Bishop Helgi's death. The new Archbishop, Sigurd, was consecrated in 1231 but did not return from the customary journey to Rome before the next year. The annalists have almost nothing to say about Bishop Nicholas. The year of his death is uncertain; it is variously given as 1240, 1241, and 1242.

For nearly three hundred years Greenland was a republic. Every year toward the close of July the important men of the two settlements gathered in the all-moot at Gardar to discuss and determine colonial affairs. Except for a brief period early in the tenth century, when some shadowy form of dependence on the Norwegian crown seems to have been recognized, Greenland was absolutely independent. But in the thirteenth century the political freedom of the colony was surrendered. Cardinal William of Sabina, who came to Norway in 1247 to crown the great King Hakon, when asked concerning the right of the Norwegian crown to Iceland gave a formal opinion that it was "unfair that that land should not be subject to some king like all others in the world."<sup>53</sup> This form of reasoning would also apply in the case of Greenland.

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<sup>49</sup> According to Alexander VI's bull (cited above) August was the only month in which the coast of Greenland could be approached with safety.

<sup>50</sup> *Póls Saga*, c. 7 (*Origines Islandicae*, i, 515).

<sup>51</sup> STORM, *Islandske Annaler*, 23, 63.

<sup>52</sup> *Grönlands historiske Mindesmærker*, ii, 757.

<sup>53</sup> *Hakon's Saga*, c. 257.

The desires of King Hakon were doubtless taken into account in the selection of a new pastor for the diocese of Gardar. Bishop Olaf, who had been consecrated the year before, sailed in the summer of 1247 with explicit instructions to secure the submission of the Greenlanders to the Norwegian crown.<sup>54</sup> He was not immediately successful, however, for the all-moot did not acknowledge the sovereignty of King Hakon before 1261.<sup>55</sup>

The following year Bishop Olaf sailed for Norway, perhaps to report on the success of his diplomatic mission. But his ship was wrecked on the coast of Iceland and he was forced to remain on that island for two years. He finally arrived in Norway in 1264. After an absence of nine years he returned to his diocese,<sup>56</sup> where he died in 1280.

For eight years the See of Gardar remained vacant. This may have been due to a bitter strife raging at the time between the archbishop and his chapter concerning the right to select bishops for the Norwegian dependencies. The king was finally called in to mediate, and in 1296 it was agreed that the archbishop should select the candidates with the advice and consent of the chapter, the rule to apply to the sees in Iceland, Greenland, the Faroes, and the Hebrides, but apparently not to the Orkneys.<sup>57</sup>

Bishop Thored, who had been consecrated in 1288, served his diocese actively for twenty years. He returned to Norway in 1309 where he remained till his death five years later.<sup>58</sup>

Thored's successor, Bishop Arne, was consecrated the same year (1314) and remained in charge of the churches of Gardar for thirty-two years. During his episcopate communication between Norway and Greenland came to be very irregular. Acting on an unfounded report, the authorities at Nidaros in 1343 consecrated John Skalli bishop of Gardar, for "Archbishop Paul did not know that Arne was still living."<sup>59</sup>

John Skalli never visited Greenland and cannot, therefore, be counted among those who actually administered the See of

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, c. 311.

<sup>56</sup> STORM, *Islandske Annaler*, anno 1271.

<sup>57</sup> *Diplomatarium Norvegicum*, iii, 44ff.

<sup>58</sup> *Diplomatarium Norvegicum*, vii, 62, 68; ix, 104; STORM, *Islandske Annaler*, anno 1314.

<sup>59</sup> STORM, *Islandske Annaler*, 273-274.

Gardar. After a few years he received a diocese in Iceland, of which he came into possession only after a long conflict with the local clergy.

Meanwhile Bishop Arne died (in 1349), and for nineteen years the colony was without a bishop.<sup>60</sup> This long vacancy was doubtless due to the demoralized condition of the Norwegian church after the Black Death, which swept over northern Europe in the year of Bishop Arne's death. "Of this pestilence died Archbishop Arne and all the canons in Nidaros except one whose name was Lodin; and he held an election and chose Olaf, the abbot of Holm, to be archbishop."<sup>61</sup> It was during this vacancy that Ivar Bardsson, who has been referred to above as steward at one time of the cathedral property at Gardar, lived in Greenland. Ivar was a young Norwegian priest who went out to the colony in 1341 (or 1342) on business for the Church in Bergen.<sup>62</sup>

In 1365 Brother Alf, a cleric residing in Bergen, was consecrated Bishop of Gardar. Three years later he took up his duties in the little northern see and apparently served his parishioners continuously for nine years. The year following his consecration we find that he transferred to Saint Michael's Monastery in Bergen certain plots of ground near this monastery on which he had built houses with his own money and with assistance from the cloister.<sup>63</sup> It seems possible to infer from this that he had been a man of affairs who had entered the clerical profession somewhat late in life.

Brother Alf was the last Bishop of Gardar who actually resided in his diocese. He laid down the crozier in 1377, but the news of his death did not reach Norway before 1383. Henry, later bishop in the Orkneys, was appointed to succeed him, but he never visited Greenland. Meanwhile the see was apparently administered by a bishop's official; such an *officialis* testified to the legality of a marriage in 1409.<sup>64</sup> When Björn the Jerusalem-farer was in Greenland in the decade following Bishop Alf's

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<sup>60</sup> STORM, *Islandske Annaler*, anno 1368 (p. 228).

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 276.

<sup>62</sup> *Diplomatarium Norvegicum*, v, 122; cf. MUNCH, *Det norske Folks Historie*, *Unionsperioden*, i, 314-315.

<sup>63</sup> *Diplomatarium Norvegicum*, xii, 80.

<sup>64</sup> *Grönlands historiske Mindesmærker*, iii, 148.

death, "an old priest held the episcopal seat and performed all manner of episcopal duties."<sup>65</sup>

#### IV

During the fourteenth century the sailings between Norway and Greenland became constantly more infrequent and irregular. The annals record that a ship came from the colony in 1410, but after that date there is silence. Left wholly to their own resources the old settlements were doomed, for civilized life could be maintained only through communication with Europe.

How and when the colony finally disappeared cannot be known, but there is some evidence that it still existed at the close of the fifteenth century. This evidence is found in a papal letter already referred to, in which the Pope excuses Bishop Matthias and the Church of Gardar from the payment of certain dues to the Roman chancery. In this document Pope Alexander states "that no vessel has touched there [Greenland] during the past eighty years." He also has been informed, he tells us, that "no memory of the Christian religion is found except a corporal, which is shown to the people once a year, and on which, it is said, the last priest who officiated there consecrated the body of Christ a hundred years ago."<sup>66</sup> So closely does this information and other facts recorded in the letter agree with what can be learned from other sources that scholars are inclined to believe that news may have come from the settlements in the Arctic shortly before 1492.<sup>67</sup>

The decline of the colony in Greenland began with the submission of 1261. It was not long before the Norwegian king stretched forth his hand to seize the trade of the Arctic. In the fourteenth century the king's officials alone had access to the wares of Greenland. Merchants who traded on their own account were forbidden even to approach the shore.<sup>68</sup>

There is some reason to believe that in the fourteenth century

<sup>65</sup> *Grönlands historiske Mindesmærker*, iii, 435 ff.

<sup>66</sup> OLSON and BOURNE, *The Northmen, Columbus, and Cabot*, 73-74; *The Catholic Historical Review*, iii, 225-226; *Diplomatarium Norvegicum*, xvii, 644. The letter was probably drawn up in 1492.

<sup>67</sup> *Historisk Tidsskrift*, 3. Række, ii, 401 (STORM); *Meddelelser om Grönland*, xlviii, 13-14 (Björnbo).

<sup>68</sup> *Grönlands historiske Mindesmærker*, iii, 435.



the ice-masses off the shore of the East Settlement increased materially in volume; consequently it became very difficult to make the land and occasionally the royal merchant ship was wrecked. The regularity of communication was further disturbed by the Black Death; after 1349 no ship seems to have sailed to Greenland for six years. The union of the Norwegian and Danish crowns (1380) also had unfortunate results for Greenland: the kings in Copenhagen showed no real interest in the distant dependency except as they insisted on their commercial monopoly.

In 1266 the sources first make mention of a native population, the *Skrælings*, who occupied the coast some distance north of the West Settlement.<sup>69</sup> There is no indication that the Greenlanders tried to convert their Eskimo neighbors; on the contrary, if we can trust a late transcription of a document that has since disappeared, some of the Greenlanders renounced the faith and joined the heathen about 1342. If Ivar Bardsson is correctly reported, the West Settlement was attacked by hostile *Skrælings* a few years later and completely destroyed. It is evident that the colony was hard pressed, for in 1355 King Magnus ordered the royal merchant ship to be fitted out for a voyage to the Arctic to assist in maintaining Christianity.<sup>70</sup> The Icelandic annals report that in 1379 the Eskimos attacked the East Settlement, slew eighteen men, and carried off two boys into captivity. This was two years after Bishop Alf, the last bishop in Greenland, had closed his labors.

. . . . .

The Diocese of Gardar ceased to be a living reality in the ecclesiastical world soon after the death of Bishop Alf, but for more than a hundred years its ghost continued to haunt the Church in the North. During the period from 1377 to 1530 at least eighteen churchmen seem to have borne the title "Bishop of Gardar," though, so far as we know, with a possible single exception, none of them ever tried to find and visit the diocese that was entrusted to his care. In some cases the honor conferred was frankly titular, but in certain other instances that can scarcely have been true.

<sup>69</sup> *Hauksbók*, 500; *Meddelelser om Grönland*, xxxi, 23 (Thalbitzer).

<sup>70</sup> *Meddelelser om Grönland*, xlviii, 11ff.

Shortly before 1377 the Pope reserved the See of Gardar to the Roman curia<sup>71</sup> and the later appointments to this office were made at Rome instead of at Nidaros. The Norwegian archbishops had apparently sought to find candidates whose families had mercantile or other interests in Greenland and who would be willing to brave the perilous sea route around Cape Farewell. The new arrangement was exceedingly unfortunate in that it failed to find men of that character and left the Church in Greenland without normal direction and government. The bishop was the natural leader of the moral forces in the colony; and with episcopal guidance and supervision Old Greenland might have continued to remain within the circle of light.

The following list of bishops who received their appointments to the See of Gardar subsequent to the death of Bishop Alf is added chiefly to complete the record. The list shows a continuous series of appointments except for a possible interruption during the two earlier decades of the sixteenth century. In one or two instances the identity may be in doubt, but in all the other cases the evidence, so far as it goes, is clear and explicit.

Bishop *Henry* appears in the documents for the first time in 1386; he was probably consecrated the year before. In 1391 he was resident and active in the diocese of the Orkneys, to which see he was translated three years later. He died in 1396.<sup>72</sup>

There is a single allusion to a Bishop *George* who died in 1389 or earlier. He was bishop by appointment from Avignon (this was the period of the Great Western Schism).<sup>73</sup>

When Henry was given the See of the Orkneys, Bishop *John* of that diocese was translated to Gardar "for the better utility of both sees."<sup>74</sup>

On the death of Bishop George, *Peter Staras*, a Franciscan friar of unknown nationality, was appointed bishop by Clement VII (Avignon).<sup>75</sup>

In 1401 the Roman curia appointed *Berthold*, probably in

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<sup>71</sup> *Diplomatarium Norvegicum*, xvii, 185.

<sup>72</sup> *Diplomatarium Norvegicum*, iii, 357; iv, 398; xvii, 142, 144, 147-149, 153; STORM, *Islandske Annaler*, anno 1391.

<sup>73</sup> *Diplomatarium Norvegicum*, xvii, 132.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, xvii, 147-148.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, xvii, 132.

succession to John (earlier of the Orkneys). Berthold employed the title "Bishop of Gardar," in extant documents from 1401 to 1426.<sup>76</sup>

In 1402 *Peter*, Bishop of Strengness (Sweden), was released from this diocese and translated to Gardar; six months later he was restored to his former see.<sup>77</sup>

In a document of 1411, John XXIII (Bologna) reported that he had recently heard of the death of *Eskil*, Bishop of Gardar. It is possible that Eskil had been appointed from Avignon in succession to Peter Staras.<sup>78</sup>

The same document notes the appointment of *Jacob Petersson Treppe*, a Danish friar (Franciscan), to succeed Eskil. Later in the same year Bishop Jacob acted for the bishop of Roeskild (Denmark) as "*in spiritualibus generalis vicarius*." His death is noted in a document of 1425.<sup>79</sup>

*Robert Ringman*, a Franciscan friar of English nationality, was appointed to the episcopal office in Greenland made vacant by the death of Brother Jacob (1425).<sup>80</sup>

Robert's successor was *Gobelinus Bolant* (or *Volant*), an Augustinian friar and a German, who received his appointment in 1431. The following year he was translated to the Danish see of Børglum.<sup>81</sup> Gobelinus had earlier served in Rome as penitentiary.

*John Erler de Moys*, a Franciscan friar (also a German and former penitentiary), received the see of Gardar in 1432, after Gobelinus had been promoted to Børglum.<sup>82</sup>

The tenure of Bishop John must have been a matter of a few months only, for there are two references to a Bishop *Nicholas* (he is called Michael in one document) who died as Bishop of Gardar in 1433.<sup>83</sup>

*Bartholomew de St. Ypolito*, a lector of the Dominican Order, was appointed to succeed Bishop Nicholas in 1433.<sup>84</sup> Bishop

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, xiii, 52, 70; xvi, 56, 74; xvii, 185-187.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, xvii, 202.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, xvii, 257.

<sup>79</sup> *Diplomatarium Norvegicum*, xvi, 62; xvii, 257, 270, 344, 936 ff.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, xvii, 344-346, 936 ff.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, xvii, 388-389, 948.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, xvii, 389, 392-393, 948-949.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, xvii, 403-404.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, xvii, 403-405.

Bartholomew's nationality is not known, but he was clearly not a North European.

Among the prelates who were present at a church council held in Oslo in 1440 was *Gregory*, Bishop of Gardar. He was also in attendance at a similar meeting held in Bergen ten years later.<sup>85</sup>

*Andrew Mus*, a Danish ecclesiastic, begins to appear in the documents as Bishop of Gardar about 1466. He had served earlier as *officialis* in Skalholt (Iceland) and was at the time vicar of the see of Linköping (Sweden). The year of his death has not been found, but it was not later than 1483.<sup>86</sup>

Bishop Andrew's successor was *Jacob Blaa*, a Dominican friar (also a Dane), whose appointment dated from 1483. He seems to have borne the title for nearly nine years at the longest, but finally resigned the honor to make room it may be believed, for a candidate who had ambitions to become something more than a titular bishop.<sup>87</sup>

In 1492, Innocent VIII designated *Matthias Knutsson*, a Danish monk of the Benedictine Order, bishop of the churches in Greenland. The appointment was subsequently confirmed by Alexander VI. It was clearly the desire of Bishop Matthias to set out on the long journey to the lost diocese at the earliest opportunity offered, but there is no record that the opportunity ever appeared.<sup>88</sup>

The last Bishop of Gardar was *Vincentius Petersson Kampe*, a Danish cleric attached to the court of Christian II, who received his appointment in 1519. King Christian was planning to send an expedition into the northwestern seas to restore communication with the abandoned colony; and the selection of a bishop was a part of this plan. But the interest of the restless king was soon diverted to other matters, and the project was abandoned.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, iv, 676; *Grönlands historiske Mindesmærker*, iii, chronology, annis 1440, 1442, 1450.

<sup>86</sup> *Diplomatarium Norvegicum*, xvi, 249; xvii, 606-607; *Grönlands historiske Mindesmærker*, iii, 188-190.

<sup>87</sup> *Diplomatarium Norvegicum*, xvii, 606-607, 638, 1131.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, xvii, 638, 643-647, 1131.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, xvii, 730, 1164-1167.

## Bibliographical Note

The materials for the study of the history of Greenland are practically all to be found in the following four great collections, though some of the documents have also been published elsewhere in more convenient forms:

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*Grönlands historiske Mindesmærker*. 3 vols. Kjöbenhavn, 1838–1845. This work includes virtually all the literary sources and a considerable number of diplomatic documents; it has been edited with much care and is useful for editorial notes as well as for the documentary materials.

*Islandske Annaler*, edited by Gustav Storm. Christiania, 1888. . . . Icelandic annals to 1578 with occasional notices of matters touching Greenland.

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